



The myth of the Amazons

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation was written as part of the MA in Black Sea cultural Studies at the International Hellenic University. The aim of this paper is to analyze the different variations and the most predominant versions of the myth of the Amazons and to present the basic mythological references of these wild warriors. Additionally, the individual mythological facts are described and the most famous figures of the Amazons are highlighted. The individual characteristics that are presented bring into negotiation the different aspects concerning the social, cultural and historical dimensions of the myth. This paper searches the reasons why this myth was created and why it became part of the Greek mythology and determines the value of the myth in general. It also presents clearly both the mythological status of the Amazons based on literary sources and the particular features of their existence in a wider context. On a second level, the figure of the Amazons is approached as a social and political phenomenon of the classical period and especially of the Athenian society. It examines the contribution of the social stereotypes of the era to the formation of the myth and the relationship with the xenophobic climate against the Persians. Finally, an indicative research between the myth and the depiction in art is attempted by analyzing their differences, their similarities and to what extent the art influenced the myth's evolution.

Keywords: Amazons, female warriors, myth, literature, art, barbarians, Athenian society.

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PREFACE

This thesis was written as the final part of the MA in Black Sea cultural Studies at the International Hellenic University. During this difficult but exciting procedure, many people have contributed with their valuable help and their academic knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

The myth¹ and the fiction are an ancient and universal social and psychological phenomenon. Humans, powerless and unprotected against the natural changes, attempt to confront them without the power of logic and thus turn into their inner world and their consciousness. Unable to understand what happens around them, they try to explain everyday life, by creating a non-existent world, where all the questions are transferred, the fears and their worries and generally all their real world. Consequently, the first source for the creation of mythology is the way that humans perceive the reality and understand their existence.

However, this is not something separate from worship and the strong fear or respect that people always felt for gods and religions. The popular consciousness and imagination easily created stories about the birth and the actions of gods, who defined and directed the world or caused physical phenomena (for example lightning, thunder, storms, fires, whirlwinds). People imagined gods who intervened in human lives (for example punishment, lust, special treatment and assistance). The first divinities had a monstrous and zoomorphic appearance, but with the passage of time all those gods that were products of their imagination, looked more anthropomorphic with a great and elegant presence.

However, when we speak about divine mythology, we should have in mind the so-called heroic mythology that was cultivated in a manner comparable to the popular consciousness and imagination. The Greek motif of heroes, men and women, looked ideal, as well as their properties. They were beautiful, strong, skillful warriors and hunters. They were the ideal human model but with the skills and powers that only a deity could have. Most of the times of course they were children of known gods, who mingled with mortals (for example Muses, Graces, Dioskouri and Horae etc) but in many cases, although they were not demigods, they enjoyed the attention and favor of folklore.

¹ Radermacher L., 1942, Kerenyi K., 2012, Κάκτιδής Ι. Θ., 1987.

The world of Greek mythology was essentially born with the creation and diffusion of epic poetry². From the oral tradition of singers until the first, completed samples of written poetry - the Homeric epics, there is an unknown period of time, within which most Greek myths were radically shaped. The literary integrity of the Homeric epics shows that the creator had in mind a mythological scene, which had been established a long time before him, and thus he was able to include perfectly the myths in his creations. Hesiod, around the same time, gives with his epic poems a complete picture of theogony, cosmology (Hesiod) and the heroic world. The material of Homeric and Hesiodic poetic production was the deep core and subsoil on which the subsequent literature was founded, although quite often the sources and the mythical figures were not always the same, which means that a legend was differed from place to place and over time. However, there were basic features that accompanied and characterized the mythical persons, particularly as regards their external appearance, their cosmic action and their morality. The variant elements mostly concern the relationship of cause and effect, which was always part of the Greek myths.

Primary and pivotal role in Greek mythology plays the woman figure³. The frequency of female presence in the epic poetry of geometric era, mainly in Homeric and Hesiodic poems, demonstrates the importance of female presence, which in the course of time becomes more and more independent in the Greek myth. Initially, women were only mentioned in the genealogical data of heroes and warriors, either as a mother or as a wife or as a companion. Later, it is obvious that she obtains a more active role as a heroine and a protagonist of the legend. Iphigenia for example is referred to, as a victim of the Trojan War in Homer and then becomes the heroine of other epic dramas with same title (Iphigenia at Aulis and Iphigenia in Tauris). In many cases, women are mentioned with the ability to horse-race and having fighting skills (eg Atalanta), or moral and intellectual superiority (Penelope), while beauty is the common characteristic of women heroines in those years. Although women's role in the society of that period was certainly very limited, it was quite often pleasant for the popular imagination to create and promote female figures that had a verisimilitude

² Lesky A., 1972, 29, Bowra C. M., 1955.

³ Mossé Cl., 2002, 42, Reeder E. D., 1995, 18, Lefkowitz M. R., 1993, 21-45.

with fairytales and no connection with the real world. In most cases, these female figures were the angry and aggressive enemies of the known heroes of mythology although they were described having an exotic beauty and supernatural abilities, items always extremely interesting and attractive to the popular sentiment.

In Greek mythology, the tribe of the Amazons is the best example of women – warriors who belongs to the category of mythical people living in fantastic places. Their superficial deeds and actions made them eternal mythical symbols of militant and insubordinate females.

THE AMAZONS

According to the legend, the Amazons⁴ were a race consisting exclusively of women. They were great at riding horses and at the art of archery. The myth says that they cut off their right breast⁵ in order to draw a bow easily. Indeed there is a theory that connects this habit with the etymology of their name, since the word “Amazons” comes from the primitive –a, which means without and the word “mazos” which means breast. As a result, the Amazons were women without breast, a characteristic that made them famous mythical figures that according to Pomponius Mela “were ready for action, able to withstand blows to the chest like men”. In order to become excessive warriors they did not even nurse their children, but they fed them with mare milk.⁶ Modern scholars explain this mastectomy in many ways. Some of them suggest that the Greeks invented the removal of the breast, in order to indicate their barbarian origin. For some others, the one breast symbolizes the Amazons’ freedom from maternal instincts. Moreover, some of them point out that Greeks associated the right side of the body with masculinity and the left one with femininity.⁷ They were real warriors, not only because of their external appearance and their preparation, but also because of their ability to fight bravely in battles and warfare. In comparison with the male sex, they were equally skilled and sometimes they even exceeded. They used to live in remote places, about which we do not have specific information. The common description of their sites is that they were hostile and inhospitable. They lived without men and they were independent and self-sufficient. The position that women had in all human communities of that era, had men in Amazons’ places. The head of their group

⁴ Roscher W. H., 1884-1937, Grimal P., 1951, Dindorf W., 1851, 723,1 ἐνθ' Ἀμαζόνων: <Λέγονται δὲ> Ἀμαζόνες ἢ <ὄτι> μάζαις καὶ ἄρτοις οὐκ ἐχρῶντο, ἢ ὅτι ἔκαιον τοὺς μαζοὺς, ἢ ὅτι οὐδόλως εἶχον μαζοὺς· ἢ ὅτι μαζὸν οὐκ ἐθήλαζον, ἀλλὰ φοράδων γάλα ἤσθιον οὔσαι νεογναί, *Eustathius Philol., Scr. Eccl., Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem*, 2.285,22 Ὅτι δὲ τὸν δεξιὸν μαστὸν ἐκ νηπίων πᾶσαι Ἀμαζόνες ἐπεκαίοντο, διὸ καὶ Ἀμαζόνες ἐλέγοντο, καὶ ἡ τοῦ Γεωγράφου ἱστορία δηλοῖ, παρ' ᾧ καὶ ταῦτα κεῖται· τίς ἂν πιστεύσειεν ὡς γυναικῶν στρατὸς ἢ πόλις ἢ ἔθνος συσταίη ἂν χωρὶς ἀνδρῶν.

⁵ Hellanikos, 4F 107 (=323a F 16b; incl. Tzetzes), Hippokrates, *Airs* 17, Diodoros 2.45.3, Apollodoros 2.5.8, Strabo 11.5.1.

⁶ Mayor A, 2014, 21.

⁷ Mayor A, 2014, 86-8.

was their queen, a person special for her bravery, her achievements and her martial ferocity. They did not cultivate the land but they only ate fruits and animals. Gymnastics, military training and temperance played a key role in their everyday life. Not only this "unorthodox" way of life make them a symbol of world mythology, but also their achievements, their presence, their connection with the main heroes of ancient Greek mythology and especially the value and the use of the myth, as a component and tool of Greek intellectual production during the classical era and afterwards.

The Amazons in Greek mythology

The Amazons are a quite famous subject known up till now in Greek mythology and the reference points to many writers and poets. Due to their wild and unusual action, it is reasonable and expected to some extent, that their life takes place in the field of war and discrimination. So we see them in major battles, campaigns, adventurous wanderings and labors of known heroes, who fought against them and usually won them. Although it is quite interesting and remarkable, the fact that their mythical presence is very often in Greek tradition, there is a lack of resources and the reports are quite often confusing. However, there is some standard information that helps us build a more comprehensive perspective of the Amazons' myth.

Literary sources

All the creations of ancient Greek literature that has survived are the main source of mythological material and information. From the period of Homer, until the end of the ancient world (476 AD), a number of writers and poets give us information about the existence of the mythical Amazons. Of course, the biggest amount of information for the legend, and therefore for the Amazons, focuses mainly on the archaic epic poetry and the ancient drama, while several elements are also found in works before Herodotus. Later, in the 4th century, the literary annotation and the revival of the epic poetry is added to this primary mythological material, and enriches it since local stories and traditions had already been excluded or forgotten. Equally important is the

contribution of the so-called indirect tradition, which included passages or quotations of unchanged material of an author that gave additional information. Finally, the material is sometimes supplemented with Latin literature and commentators until the era of Ioannis Tzetis (11th century AD). References of the mythical Amazons are also found directly or indirectly in the ancient Greek literary production. Although the volume of material is huge, the form of the texts and their quality do not allow firm conclusions. The writers that give a more complete picture of the Amazons are: Homer, Apollonius Rhodius, Diodorus of Sicily, Apollodorus, Euripides, Quintus Smyrna, Pindar, Plutarch, Pausanias, Stobaios.

However, information about the existence of the Amazons is found in the comments of Lykophron (Tzetis), in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius and in the comments of Pediasimos, Aeschylus, Photius and other authors and Dictionaries (Suidas etc). Apart from the written sources of course, very important is the contribution of pottery, sculpture, painting and archeology (archaeological finds, tombs, etc.) that constitute the framework within which the knowledge about the myth of the Amazons is included.

The Amazons in Homer

As it was mentioned before, the warlike Amazons made their "debut" at the most appropriate textual environment of the ancient Greek literature, the heroic epic. In the *Iliad* (teichoskopia)⁸, Priam was watching the large army of Greeks and while he was stunned, he remembered another such army, that of the Phrygians, which he had attended himself. It was the battle against the Amazons in the Sakarya River, whose outcome was victorious. The Amazons were characterized as 'ἀντιάνηραί', a Greek word which at the first sight could be interpreted as equal to men or men's enemies. In rhapsody VI, the episode of the recognition of Diomedes and Glaukus⁹, is described the story of a Corinthian hero, Bellerophon, whose next labor, after defeating Himaira,

⁸ West, M. L., 1998, *Iliad* III.

⁹ *Iliad* VI 119-211.

was to crush the people of the Amazons, who were in the area. Eventually Belerephon with his winged horse Pegasus managed to deal with the strong army of the Amazons. Unfortunately, we do not have more information.

The Amazons in the rest epic – heroic poetry

Except for the above brief and general information in Iliad, there is no mention of the Amazons in the other great epic of Homer's, Odyssey, despite the fact that the hero, Odysseus, travelled a lot and visited the most unlikely places in order to complete the twelve labors he was asked to. It should also be noticed that the Amazons were not mentioned in any of Hesiod's works (Works and Days, Theogony), nor in the Homeric hymns¹⁰. However, a passage of Proclus in Aithiopida of Arktinus of Miletus (only a few passages of the complete work are saved), refers to the active presence of the Amazons in the Trojan War¹¹. The queen and leader of the Amazons, Penthesilea, who was the daughter of Mars, arrived from Thrace with a large army to help the Trojans against the Greeks. The story is set out and completed by later writers like Nonnus, Tryphiodorus and especially Quintus Smyrnaeus.

So when Hector was killed by Achilles' spear, the Trojans lost their confidence because they were headless. Then the Amazons arrived from Thermodon with their godlike queen Penthesilea, who had a strong desire to fight and defuse the pain she felt, because she had accidentally killed her sister Hippolyte¹². Despite the fact that Priam had once fought the Amazons, he agreed to fulfill Penthesilea's desire, so she ran to offer her help. The Trojans welcomed them with relief and excitement because they felt scared to go and fight in the plain. Priam promised them many rich gifts if they

¹⁰ Dowden K., 1997, 99.

¹¹ Bernabé A., 1987, Fragment 1, line 2b.

¹² Quintus *Epic.*, 1:1963, 2:1966, 3:1969, καὶ τότε Θερμώδοντος ἀπ' εὐρυπόροιο ῥεέθρων ἦλυθε Πενθεσίλεια θεῶν ἐπιειμένη εἶδος, ἄμφω καὶ στονόεντος ἐελδομένη πολέμοιο καὶ μέγ' ἄλευαμένη στυγερὴν καὶ ἀεικέα φήμην, μή τις ἐὼν κατὰ δῆμον ἐλεγχείῃσι χαλέψῃ ἀμφὶ κασιγνήτης, ἧς εἵνεκα πένθος ἄεξεν, Ἴππολύτης: τὴν γάρ ῥα κατέκτανε δουρὶ κραταιῷ, οὐ μὲν δὴ τι ἐκοῦσα, τιτυσκομένη δ' ἐλάθιοιο. τοῦνεκ' ἄρα Τροίης ἐρικυδέος ἵκετο γαῖαν.

helped them to remove the Achaeans. Penthesilia vowed to kill Achilles and burn the ships of the Greeks. Indeed the other day, using the armor that Mars had donated her, she led the Trojans to war. The Greeks were astonished by the momentum of the Amazons and their beauty, but still they attacked them aggressively. The battle was fierce, long lasting and had numerous victims. Many Amazons distinguished themselves, like Klonia, Polemoussa, Dirinoi, Bremoussa, Alkivia, Antivroti and others. But the best one was Penthesilia, who like the goddess Athena, killed excessive heroes like Machaon, Molion, Elassipo and many others. During the battle, many episodes of duel took place between the Greek heroes and the Amazons and the outcome was inconclusive. The women of Trojans, fearful for the fury and the bravery of the Amazons, wanted to take the weapons and fight. However, thanks to the intervention of Theano, they were unsuccessful, since they were not able and ready to fight. Penthesilia and the other fighters dispersed death over the Achaeans for three days. When they started approaching the ships, Achilles with his cousin Ajax, the son of king Telamon, went to battle for the first time. Ajax lunged at the Trojans and Achilles at the Amazons. Achilles killed many of them promptly, and when Penthesilia saw him, she approached to confront him. Achilles marked her and hit her above the right breast. Penthesilia, although wounded, rushed against him with her ax. Achilles killed her with his sword and after she fell dead on the ground, he removed her helmet to see her face. Dazzled by her beauty and the purity of her virginity, he felt very sad and grieved for killing such a beautiful and brave woman. At that moment, he fell in love with her and thought that she could have been a worthy companion for him. So he stopped fighting and withdrew from the battle. Thersites who was a Greek gossip noticed the incident and characterized him as acting like a woman. Achilles, influenced by the moving moment, killed him with a punch. The battle ended with the victory of the Achaeans and the Amazons were decimated. However, they allowed the Trojans to collect the bodies in order to honor the dead people and Penthesilia was burned in a large fire. Her ashes and her bones were collected.

Heracles and the Amazons – Hippolyte's belt

One of the labors that Eurystheus ordered Hercules to accomplish¹³ was to bring the golden belt of the queen of the Amazons Hippolyta to his daughter, which was a gift from the god Mars. The story takes place in the town of the Amazons called Themiscyra, beside the river Thermodon, in the area of the Southern Black Sea.¹⁴ There was a reputation that this belt was a source of strength and enforcement. Hercules decided to take with him some other heroes of the era («ἐθελοντὰς συμμάχους»), in order to deal with the wild Amazons. The latter welcomed them with hospitality and served a dinner in their honor. Heracles explained with kind and flattering words the reasons why he wanted the belt and Hippolyte promised to give him what he wanted. Then the goddess Hera, who always pursued Heracles, was transformed into an Amazon and by using incendiary words persuaded the rest of them that the Greeks wanted to conquer their kingdom. After that, they took their weapons and went to the port, where the Greek boat was moored. Hercules thought that they had set him a trap and went to confront them. In the ensuing battle, the Amazons were defeated and most of them lost their lives. Heracles killed Hippolyte and took the coveted belt.

Another version of this myth says that the Amazons were from the first moment inhospitable and hostile towards Greeks and they immediately started battling with them. Hercules and his companions annihilated the army and the kingdom of the Amazons.¹⁵ Hippolyte or her sister Melanippi was taken captive and Heracles exchanged her life with the belt of Hippolyte. Theseus took Antiope prisoner and Melanippi was killed by Telamon¹⁶.

¹³ Κακριδής Ι.Θ., 4^{ος} τόμος.

¹⁴ Themiscyra was located in the Southern part of the Black Sea, between Sinope and Trebizond, an important area for the colonies of Miletus. So it is impossible not to relate the metropolis of the country of the Amazons with Miletus. The walls of Themiscyra are visible on an amphora of the 6th c AD, Dowden K., 101, Figueira G., 1942, 8-14.

¹⁵ Diodorus Siculus, 2,46,4,1 (...)τὸ ἔθνος τοῦτο τελέως συντρίψαι. διόπερ τοὺς περιοικοῦντας βαρβάρους τῆς μὲν ἀσθενείας αὐτῶν καταφρονήσαντας, τῶν δὲ καθ' ἑαυτοὺς μνησικακήσαντας, πολεμῆσαι συνεχῶς τὸ ἔθνος ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ὥστε μηδ' ὄνομα τοῦ γένους τῶν Ἀμαζονίδων ἀπολιπεῖν.

¹⁶ *Scholia in Lycophronem*, Scholion 1327, line 6.

Theseus and the Amazons

In the campaign that Heracles organized in order to take the belt of Hippolyte, a budding hero, whose name was Theseus, took part. During his residence there, Theseus met the Amazon Antiope and fell in love with her at first sight. Her name varies. Most authors call her Antiope, but some of them give her the name Glafki, Melanippi or even Hippolyte. It is not exactly clear if and how Antiope helped the Greeks, but it is suspected that Antiope took Hippolyti's belt for the sake of Theseus and Hercules rewarded him by offering Antiope. At this point, there is the version of the myth, according to which Theseus besieged Themiscyra – the capital of the Amazon's nation - without success. Antiope decided to help Greeks and betrayed her companions when she saw Theseus and fell in love with him. Then she followed him to Athens.

According to the biographer of antiquity, Plutarch,¹⁷ after a certain period of time, Theseus went to the land of the Amazons again and captured Antiope after a victorious battle. As he mentions, they did not depart immediately but they remained for a while in Bithynia. Among the companions of Theseus were three brothers, Thoas, Solois and Evneos. The first one fell in love with Antiope, but in order not to offend his leader and stay loyal, he confided his secret to his closest friend and committed suicide by falling into the river, which later took the name Soloentas.

So Theseus and Antiope in one way or another returned to Athens and Antiope gave birth to their baby boy Hippolytus. However, their happiness did not last long because the Amazons decided to campaign against Greeks and get back Antiope. According to tradition, they crossed the frozen Cimmerian Bosphorus and arrived in Athens by land.¹⁸ They encamped in Pnyx but neither of the two sides took the decision to start the war. Theseus made a start in the month Boedromion¹⁹ and the area where the bat-

¹⁷ Plutarch Theseus, 26-27.

¹⁸ Plutarch Theseus, 27, 2.

¹⁹ Athenian celebration called "Βοηδρόμια".

the battle took place was called by the next generations Amazoneion. It is also said that Theseus had lined up into dense phalanxes around the Supreme Court. Antiope using her bow fought alongside the Greeks. Although she fought bravely, she lost her life in the battle. There is a debate about the winner of the battle. Some scholars say that Greeks won, some others that there were no winners and according to others the war ended after a treaty.²⁰ The Amazons who arrived in Athens left the signs of their residence in various places such as Megara, Euboea etc. There is another variant of the end of Antiope. According to this, while Theseus was getting married to Phaedra, Antiope with the other Amazons rushed into the palace where the wedding was taking place. However, Theseus managed to resist and after he repelled them, he killed them. The myth of Theseus and Antiope or Hippolyte ends with the forbidden love of his stepmother Phaedra with the young Hippolytus, which ends with the suicide of the first and the curse of Theseus at his son, which caused him major chaos.²¹

The Amazons and Alexander the Great

According to tradition,²² the race of the Amazons continued to exist during the period of Alexander the Great. It is said, that the Macedonian commander contacted the queen of The Amazons, Thalestris, when he approached the northern part of the Persian Empire, in the area of Caucasus. Plutarch takes a very cautious approach about the issue, by citing the conflicting testimonies.²³ In his impartial biography of Alexander, *“many authors report that the queen of the Amazons went to visit him in Hyrcania”*. He names fourteen historians, some of whom accepted the fact, some doubt-

²⁰ The place where the agreement was signed was called *“Ορκωμόσιον”*.

²¹ It is the story of the homonymous tragedy of Euripides *“Hippolytus”*, which was taught in 428BC and received the first prize.

²² Plutarch Alexander, 46, 1-5, Diodorus 17, 77, 1-3, Arrian Alexander 7, 13, Historia Alexandri Magni, Recensio XXI 220, 2 .

²³ Plutarch Alexander, 46, 1-3, Ἐνταῦθα δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀφικέσθαι τὴν Ἀμαζόνα οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσιν, ὧν καὶ Κλεΐταρχός ἐστι καὶ Πολύκλειτος καὶ Ὀνησίκριτος καὶ Ἀντιγένης καὶ Ἰστρος. Ἀριστόβουλος δὲ καὶ Χάρης ὁ εἰσαγγελεύς, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις Ἑκαταῖος ὁ Ἐρετριεύς καὶ Πτολεμαῖος καὶ Ἀντικλείδης καὶ Φίλων ὁ Θηβαῖος καὶ Φίλιππος ὁ Θεαγγελεύς καὶ Φίλιππος ὁ Χαλκιδεὺς καὶ Δοῦρις ὁ Σάμιος πλάσμα φασὶ γεγονέναι τοῦτο.

ed it and some others described it in several different ways. Plutarch believed that reliable historians were the cautious ones, as they ought to.

Myth or reality, the story of Thaliastri and Alexander the Great is quite charming with abundant exaggeration and romance. The romance takes place in the country of Hyrcania, which was located on the South coast of the Caspian Sea. Alexander the Great camped there during his march to India. Thaliastri, the queen of the Amazons, who had her kingdom between Phasis and Thermodon River, visited him. She was accompanied by three hundred (300) Amazons on horseback and her aim was not to fight but to copulate and have a child with him. As stated by Diodorus Siculus, Alexander was surprised by the unexpected visit and when he asked her about her intentions, she replied that after she learned about his achievements and his greatness, she decided resolutely to pair off with him and give birth to an excellent child, since both parents had superlative virtues (power, beauty, bravery, war and strategic ability etc). The invitation did not take Alexander by surprise, who eagerly accepted the offer, as Diodorus mentions. After spending thirteen days and nights as a couple, he honored her by giving her generous farewell gifts and then Thaliastri left with her companion. Justine²⁴ provides a few more details about the turmoil that was caused by the arrival of the impressively dressed Amazons in Alexander's camps. As Justin states, Thaliastri was a strangely dressed woman and the purpose of her visit was in general surprising: *she went there looking for his love. Alexander decided to spend thirteen days with his visitor and when she was sure that she had conceived a child she left.*

Another interesting variant of this story is cited by Arrian in the work "Anabasis of Alexander"²⁵. According to this, Atropates, the satrap of Media, who after the death of Darius acknowledged Alexander the Great as the Great King and retained his office and his satrapy, decided to give Alexander a hundred (100) women and he claimed that they belonged to the tribe of Amazons. Indeed, they had a martial appearance but instead of spears, they held axes and instead of shields, they held pelts («πλήν γέ δὴ ὅτι πελέκεις ἀντὶ δοράτων ἐφόρουσιν καὶ ἀντὶ ἀσπίδων πέλτας»). Alexander immediately ordered to send them away and promised to meet the leader of the Amazons later

²⁴ Jeep J., 1859, II, 4, 5, 12.3.5-7.

²⁵ Geier R., 1856, 7, 14.

and to accept her proposal «πρὸς αὐτὴν παιδοποιησόμενος»²⁶. Additional information about this issue provides the Latin historian Quintus Curtius Rufus in his work *Historiae Alexandri Magni*.²⁷ He also says that Thaliastri, burned with the desire to meet the King, left her place with her huge escort. While she was reaching the area where he had camped, she ordered her messengers to precede and herald her arrival and her intentions. After the consent of Alexander, she arrived at the camp with not all of her troops but with a guard of only 300 women.

The romance of the fearless Amazon with the occupier of the borders of that era's known world was the context of many fictions. Letters of antiquity related to Alexander are considered as doubtful. The episode of the successive letters that were sent between the Amazons and Alexander adheres to the same rule, according to the opinion of Pseudo Kallisthenes²⁸ in his work "the novel of Alexander". This novel preserved and popularized the myth of Alexander in the middle Ages.²⁹

After Alexander subdued the kings Darius and Porus, when he reached the area of Caucasus, he also wanted to subdue the indomitable and famous Amazons³⁰. So he sent a letter where he nominated himself as governor of the world «αὐτοκράτωρ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου» and desired to meet them not in order to fight them but in order to see them because he had heard the rumors about their bravery and their great government. «ὅχι διὰ νὰ σᾶς πολεμήσω, ἀλλὰ διὰ νὰ σᾶς ἰδῶ, ὅτι ἀπὸ πολλοὺς ἀκούω τὴν ἀνδρείαν σας καὶ τὴν καλὴν σας κυβέρνησιν ὅπου ἔχετε». In the first letter of their reply the horrible and brave Amazons «φρικτὲς καὶ ἀνδρειωμένες εἰς τὰ ἄρματα», asked Alexander not to reach their area and as an exchange to give him whatever he asked. In his second letter, Alexander asks «χαράτζιον» and the most beautiful fifteen hundred Amazons, many horses and valuable treasures. Indeed the Amazons said in their last letter that they were entirely subdued to Alexander and that they decided to send

²⁶ Geier R., 7, 14, 3, 9.

²⁷ Hedicke E., 1908, 6.5.24 - 32.

²⁸ The name was used in newer scripts for Alexander's novel, which is a compilation of various parts and was later distorted under the name of the Historian Callisthenes of Olynthus.

²⁹ The work is written in Greek language and is placed somewhere in the 3rd c BC. Regarding the edits, there is the oldest one (*Historia Alexandri Magni* (Recensio a) and followed many others until today.

³⁰ Kroll W., 1926, 220, 2.

him annually gold and the most brave and dedicated women that would be renewed every year.

The Amazons during the reign of Myrina

As it is noted, the myth of Amazons is in direct connection and relationship with the mythological cycles of other heroes that are famous in Greece, for example Heracles, Theseus, Achilles, Bellerephon, Priam etc. But the knowledge we have about this subject will always be incomplete since the collection of the rich mythological tradition cannot be limited to the today's known sources, but to a certainly, much broader and greater one. One mythological race of women would certainly have its own, unique stories of exploits, accomplishments and adventures that often touched the limits of exaggeration.

Such mythical information about the Amazons is delivered by Diodorus of Sicily³¹, who devotes a large part of his library to their race. According to the myth, the first Amazons were identified in the Libyan region much earlier than it is thought. When Myrina became their queen, their nation became much stronger and their army much larger with more than thirty thousand infantry and three thousand on horseback with powerful shields and weapons sheathed with hard snakeskins³². Being at the height of their military glory, they attacked the land of the Atlantean, they conquered the Cairns and they killed all men but not women and children. Then those who remained begged Myrina for mercy and promised to follow the instructions and the lifestyle of the Amazons strictly. The new city that was named Myrina was built on the ruins of the destroyed one. The people of Atlantean offered many gifts to Myrina, because the Amazons treated them with compassion. Myrina undertook to hit the Gorgons in return, which was another warlike tribe³³ that used to make frequent raids on the area. The battle between them was fierce and the Gorgons stood up, strongly but

³¹ Vogel C. T., Fischer V., I-III, 1888-1906.

³² Vogel C. T., Fischer V, III, 54, 2-6.

³³ Vogel C. T., Fischer V, I.I. III, 52,4,3, Γέγονε μὲν οὖν πλείω γένη γυναικῶν κατὰ τὴν Λιβύην μάχιμα καὶ τεθουμασμένα μεγάλως ἐπ' ἀνδρείᾳ· τό τε γὰρ τῶν Γοργόνων ἔθνος, ἐφ' ὃ λέγεται τὸν Περσέα στρατεῦσαι, παρειλήφαμεν ἀλκῇ διαφέρον.

the Amazons prevailed after killing or capturing many of them.³⁴ However, they did not manage to exterminate them all and those Gorgons that remained alive chose the woods as a place of concealment.

When later they appeared suddenly, they caused serious losses to the Amazons. Myrina buried all her dead warriors in large graves and the burial place was later known as the Amazons' pile «Ἀμαζόνων σωρούς»³⁵. The state of the Amazons was strengthened and spread. Myrina having the king of Egypt Horus as an ally attacked the Arabs, subjugated Syria and Cilicia and reached the northern Asia Minor³⁶. In those places, she founded and built several cities and gave them her own name or the names of other Amazons. Typical is the case of Lesbos as Myrina and Mytilene were named after the Amazons (Mytilene was Myrina's sister). When after a while their lives were in danger, the mother of gods threw them on a desert island, which Myrina dedicated to the goddess and organized multiple celebrations and ceremonies. The island took the name Samothrace. It is also said that the sanctuary of the goddess was built there. But the end of the Amazons and the glorious Myrina had come. Myrina was killed in a fierce battle with Mopsus and Sipylum, two fallen kings of the wider region³⁷. The Amazons were defeated in successive battles, lost their lands and dispersed. Those that were rescued returned to their home in Libya. That was the end of the glorious period of Myrina's reign. (Καὶ τὴν μὲν στρατείαν τῶν ἀπὸ Λιβύης Ἀμαζόνων μυθολογοῦσι τοιοῦτο λαβεῖν τὸ πέρας).

ANALYSIS OF THE AMAZONS' PRESENCE IN MYTH

If we want to analyze and evaluate the myth of the Amazons and every part of it objectively, we should not only take into consideration the concrete data of the written sources, but we should also be aware of the general context where the myth belongs. And this is essential since we do not have the entire ancient Greek literature, so it is difficult to understand why a myth has been composed and reported in a certain

³⁴ Vogel C. T., Fischer V., III, 54, 6-7.

³⁵ Vogel C. T., Fischer V., III, 55, 2, 1-5.

³⁶ Vogel C. T., Fischer V., III, 55, 5,1.

³⁷ Vogel C. T., Fischer V., III, 55, 11, 2.

way, how a story reached a specific level etc. Moreover, the oral tradition preexisted the written word, which was afterwards gradually created and transformed and was finally formed in a way that was used and exploited by poets and novelists. According to the existing data of the Greek mythology and apart from the information given by the art of pottery and ceramics, the myth of the Amazons is an integral part of Greek mythology, which was almost finalized in the early period of the surviving literary production. The fragmentary and sporadic presence of this myth demands careful consideration and analysis, always in relation to the social and cultural standards of the era.

Regarding the epic poetry, the so-called Amazonomachy should be examined in the light of the overall negotiation of the heroic epic. This story and more specifically the dwelling between Achilles and Penthesilia highlights the undisputed martial skills of Achilles but at the same time reveals a more sensitive and vulnerable side of him. The Amazons are described with the known exaggeration, which is characteristic in epic poetry and indicates their reputation. Their value is already known but only on the side of the enemies of the Greeks, the Trojans. In Iliad the Amazons appear twice: first of all towards Bellerophon and afterwards towards Priam. In both cases, the facts take place in foreign areas and more specifically in Asia Minor (Lycia-Saggarios). This seems to be an attempt to connect the Homeric world with the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean and Asia Minor³⁸; and it could be true if we take into consideration the Homeric anachronism, although the relations of Greek tribes with people of Asia Minor cannot be defined well (eg. Hittites). However, the strange presence of the Amazons in the region of Lycia could be explained by the fact of the population movements, which caused many fights until the 7th century AD.³⁹ Homer does have an acquaintance with the tradition and the legends of the East. Bellerophon is the link in the first case and Priam in the other. They both defeated the Amazons, whose military ability is emphasized with the use of the word *ἀντιάνηραι*⁴⁰. This same adjective accompanies the only two references to the Amazons. According to the *Etymologicum Magnum*⁴¹, the

³⁸ Blok J.H., 1995, 289.

³⁹ Blok J.H., 1995, 289.

⁴⁰ Iliad III 189 (...ἥματι τῷ ὅτε τ' ἦλθον Ἀμαζόνες ἀντιάνειραι.), Z 186 (...τὸ τρίτον αὖ κατέπεφνεν Ἀμαζόνας ἀντιανείρας.).

⁴¹ *Etymologicum Magnum*, 111, line 35, the word «ἀντιάνειραι».

adjective refers to the Amazons and means equal to men or hostile towards them.⁴² The fact that in both reports the two phrases are recorded in the same way indicates that it is probably a very common formula that is used in epics.⁴³ The semantic analysis of the word does not allow its use for the male gender (=ἴσος προς ἄνδρα)⁴⁴ and the plural refers to a set of women since the end of the word is without doubt feminine (-αι). In Homer, of course, the words that have as a first component the word ἀντί- do not indicate the movement against but equality or similarity (λ.χ. ἀντίθεοιο). Considering that the Homeric epics, and in this case Iliad, were not the result of quick assignment, but perfect specimens of the poetry of the era, the choice of the adjective-characterization was not accidental. But certainly, the reader of the Iliad ignores the martial graces of the Amazons, since in both cases there is no detailed description. A vivid picture of the martial virtues of the Amazons is given by another source, the work of Quintus Smyrna. However, the audience of Homer and of other poets of the era was suspicious and knew many details that people of our times ignore. It is therefore likely that they felt surprised when they heard the later ally Priam saying that he would fight against them. So the question that arises is why they hastened to ask the Trojans' purpose since they were their enemy. This could be explained if we think about the tradition, which says that there was a genus of women that used to fight alongside men.⁴⁵ Apart from the ethnographic items, there were many ancient writers and commentators, who identified the race of the Amazons with the race of Suromatae and Sarmatians⁴⁶. This race, geographically located in the area of Caucasus, had many similarities with the Scythians and according to the available sources, women had a more active role than those in Greece. As Herodotus mentions (4.16-36), after the destruction of the city by Heracles, they left their area, they wandered, they reached the land of the Scythians after many adventures, they gradually started having

⁴² Ἐπίθετον Ἀμαζόνος· ὁ μὲν Ἀρίσταρχος, τὰς ἴσας ἀνδράσιν· ἔνιοι δὲ, τὰς ἀντιαζούσας καὶ ἐναντιουμένας τοῖς ἀνδράσι τῇ οἰκείᾳ δυνάμει· ἐξ οὗ πολεμικάς·

⁴³ Blok J.H., 1995, 155.

⁴⁴ Blok J.H., 1995, 158-161.

⁴⁵ Bisset K. A., 1971, 151.

⁴⁶ <Ἀμαζόνες,> ἔθνος γυναικεῖον πρὸς τῷ Θερμώδοντι, ὡς Ἐφορος, ἃς νῦν Σαυροματίδας καλοῦσι, Meineke A., 1849, Dowden K., 104, Lefkowitz M.R., 32.

contacts with the natives and finally they united and became couples. The Amazons, being more independent, kept their earlier model of life and started fighting with their men. But let's get back to Penthesilia. Apollodorus⁴⁷ gives the mythological explanation that Penthesilia had accidentally killed her sister. Priam undertook her expiation and thus begun a new relationship between the two races. Still it is difficult to explain why Penthesilia chose an enemy to purge her of the unintended murder. This fact and her moral commitment to fight on the side of Priam, leads us to a mythological view, widely known by the legend of Tydeus. However, Priam gives a different view for his Amazonomachi. The fact that the elder king of Troy is unable to fight, is something that is repeated several times in Iliad. But although the reference to the military proceedings of the elder king in the epic is unique and we do not have much information, it is known that in the past he faced the Amazons and defeated them, because his image used to be heroic and that of a brave man's, who dared to deal with the equal to men "ἰσάνδρες" Amazons. It could be said that with one single verse Homer remodels Priam's profile, which in the entire epic has a completely different color⁴⁸. The story of the Amazons was popular during the composition of the Homeric epics, despite the fact that it creates problems with the interpretation and difficulties to deal with the continuation of the epic. Nevertheless, the oral tradition can justify such a deviation from the usual. As far as it concerns the story of Bellerophon, it is easiest to understand its relevance to the story of the Amazons. His heroic status itself (origin, labors, help and punishment of gods) justifies the presence of the Amazons as a rival. Besides, the story with the Amazons is one of his labors. But still the reference to them is very brief. The figure and the action of Bellerophon as a hero, exists between two worlds: the West (Greece) and the East (Asia Minor). According to Kirk⁴⁹, the journey of Bellerophon in Lycia is not something that dates much before the 7th century BC, and it clearly refers to the 8th-7th century BC, when the interest for the Near East became stronger and the links that were developed and as a result, the cultural influences became obvious. It is not accidental that a central role in the story of Bellerophon plays

⁴⁷ Apollodorus, Epitaph, V, 1-2.

⁴⁸ Iliad III, 186,191,225,249,259.

⁴⁹ Kirk G. S., 1974, 150.

“the wife of Potiphar”, who represents the motif of the despised woman⁵⁰, which is widely adopted and used in the East and the West. As far as it concerns the presence of the Amazons in the myth, we must take into account the fact that there is an absolute symmetry between the story of Bellerophon and the individual events⁵¹. Iobates comes from Lycia and Bellerophon kills the people of Lycia (Z 189-190) · he later kills the people of Solymos⁵², and Solymos with the aid of Mars kill his son Isandro (Z 204-5). So when the hero attacks and kills the Amazons, the goddess Artemis kills Bellerophon’s daughter, Laodamia (Z 205). So what is the relationship between Artemis and the Amazons? Except for the obvious similarities (warriors that live in wild locations, archery ability, virginity, hunting, wild beauty etc) that justify a possible religious devotion to the face of the goddess Artemis, many literary references attest a particular religious tradition connected with the goddess. Pausanias for example, says that the Amazons were the main reason for the cult of the Ephesian Artemis, because it is said that they had founded a sanctuary and a statue dedicated to her⁵³. The fact that the literary sources attribute the foundation of the sanctuary of Artemis to the Amazons shows that the worship of the Goddess was quite old and had an exotic character⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ The motive of Potiphar’s wife is a broad literary theme. The story first appears in a tale of 1200 BC, which was found on a papyrus. It presents the wife of Anubis, who falls in love with his brother Bata. The same motive also applies to Peleus, to the wife of Akastos and to Hippolytus and Phaedra. Similarly, in the story of Joseph Pangalos and the wife of Potiphar. Apart from Potiphar’s wife, there is another theme in our history that is found in the Old Testament: The letter that Proitos sent to his father-in-law in order to kill Bellerophon. This fact reminds us of King David, who in order to get rid of a Hittite person, Uriah, sent him with such a letter to Joab. The story is also presented in fairytales, albeit with many variations.

⁵¹ Blok J.H., 1995, 310.

⁵² Predatory people that lived near the eastern border of the Kingdom of Lycia.

⁵³ J.G. Frazer, 1913, 4.31, 8, 3.

⁵⁴ Artemis of Ephesus is the main deity of the city of Ephesus, housed in the famous sanctuary, Artemision, located 1200m from the initial area of establishment of the Greek colonists. The modern research recognizes the historicity of the information that many ancient sources supply. According to these, the Greek colonists landed at a point, where Leleges and Kares (or Lydians) worshipped the Mother of the Gods. The colonists respected the beliefs of the indigenous and accepted the worship of the goddess, who was identified with Artemis. The goddess is regarded as the amalgam of two different divinities and traditions, of the Mycenaean Artemis and of a pre-Greek one, Opis or Oupis of the city

However, the military morale is not what classifies them as servants of Artemis, since it is a characteristic that fits more to the God of war. They have a feminine nature that does not need or does not want men: they are independent women, mountain-dwellers and virgins that have the power to confront men equally. In the case of the Homeric Bellerophon the Amazons are not considered as serious and difficult opponents. The mythical, female monster Chimera is regarded as the hardest enemy. The race of the Solymos (men) is followed by the race of the Amazons, who are something between men and women. Bellerophon is able to defeat any kind of opponents⁵⁵. As mentioned above, the Trojan cycle is a group of poems that recounts the story of the Trojan War, which apart from the Iliad and Odyssey included many other epics that have been lost until today⁵⁶. In one of them, which is called Aithiopida and includes all the events that followed the Iliad and the Little Iliad, appears the figure of the Amazons and their queen Penthesilia. The extract from Aithiopida, which refers to Proclus, is so short, that we only have vague information about the myth and more specifically about the fight between Achilles and Penthesilia and the love of the hero for the queen⁵⁷. The Posthomerica of Quintus Smyrna gives a clearer picture about the story.

Priam was the only hero of the Iliad that met the Amazons even as an enemy. However, no information was given about their bravery and their military capacity. The arrival of the Amazons is in many ways catalytic for the story and the evolution of the myth. So far only the warlords of the two warring sides were distinguished in the battle "that glorifies men". Besides, it is obvious that we are not talking about an area of action that concerns the women of the era. The war is a business and a privilege only of men, who are prepared and trained for this since their childhood. «Λόγων τὲ ῥητῆρ ἔμειναι, ἔργων τὲ πρηκτῆρ» (I440-3), said Phoenix to Achilles and it was true. What he meant was that the world of the war and the battle is clearly male and is governed by its own laws and codes of conduct. Penthesilia arrived in Troja with the Amazons as a

Αρααα, which existed in the place of Greek Ephesus. Klugmann agrees with this opinion and considers the establishment of the sanctuary of Artemis, not an Athenian but an Ephesian tradition, Klügmann A., 1875, 32.

⁵⁵ Tyrrell W. P., 1984, 90.

⁵⁶ Τσοπανάκης Α., 2006, 14.

⁵⁷ Blok J. H., 1995, 196.

rescuer from a suffocating siege, which after the death of Hector had become embarrassing. Priam accepted with pleasure, the assistance that the Amazons offered, since they were not simple and everyday women, but real warriors «ἀντιάνειραι». Indeed, he had already experienced their power. But is this something the Trojans accepted because they did not have any other solution? The question is: Does the ethics of the Trojans adhere to this practice just because they are oriental people? Obviously, this is not a question that is easy to clear up, but certainly, the Amazons are not considered as men by the Trojans. It is not accidental that the women of Trojans urged each other to take the arms and involve themselves in the battle but with the intervention of the elder woman Theano, they remained ineffectual «what do they know about war and battles? They should leave the Amazons and men to fight»⁵⁸. The Amazons had already lost their feminine nature in the initial phase of the battle and were counted as warriors. Then Penthesilia had taken the position of Hector as head of the Trojans and the allies, a position that later belonged to Memnon, the king of Ethiopians. The image that the Achaeans faced was unprecedented and they were amazed when they saw the Trojans with the Amazons reaching the plain (...Ἀργεῖοι δ' ἀπάνευθεν ἐθάμβεον, εὔτ' ἐσίδοντο Τρῶας ἐπεσσυμένους καὶ Ἀρηίδα Πενθεσίλειαν, τοὺς μὲν δὴ θήρεσσιν ἐοικότας..., Κόιντος 205). The excellence of Penthesilia and the Amazons almost reached the glory of Hector, since the Trojans managed to repel the Greeks and the battle was extended to the area of the ships, where Achilles and Ajax withdrew. The Amazons were unknown to them and they did not evaluate them, as important personalities that were able to embarrass them in the battle. However, the Amazons won and exceeded due to their valor. The story ends with the entrance of Achilles in the battle, the death of Penthesilia, the withdrawal of the Trojans into the castle and the victory of the Greeks. The romance between Achilles and Penthesilia is part of the tragedy in this situation. Penthesilia, as an “alias” Hector exceeded in the battle, but her superficial powers had limits, since she was not able to win or kill Achilles. Her female side was revealed after her death and then she had the role of alias Briseis, the only woman for whom Achilles had erotic feelings. And here is the tragic point of this story, which has offered so much to the global literature: Achilles falls in love with

⁵⁸ Quintus of Smyrna, 1. 447-474.

someone he cannot have because of his sword. However, he cannot receive the death penalty, because the Amazon appears as a man and her real gender is revealed after he sees her without her helmet. The description of her characteristics is wonderful and lyrical and compiles all her feminine elements. She is extremely beautiful, pure, brave and honorable but she is sentenced to death. The Amazons and especially Penthesilia highlight the unique valor of Achilles and his sensitive side. In the world of heroes and war, there is no place for the Amazons as winners. The oral tradition of the 8th and 7th century BC, which narrated the story of the women warriors, who fought against men but were defeated bitterly, has been a useful and valuable lesson for all women, who must not violate the unwritten, social laws, the regularity and the natural course of things. In this case, the epic heroic reality restores everything determinedly.

The Amazons burst onto the history of Athens as opponents of Heracles after 575BC and at the same time, they appear in black figure vases⁵⁹. The campaign of Heracles in Thermodon or in the land of the Scythians in order to acquaint the belt of Hippolyte or Melanippe (queen of the Amazons) is described in tradition of earlier times and it survives in other newer versions⁶⁰. The poets and the historians used the struggles of Heracles with the Amazons in order to justify the presence or the absence of the Amazons in various places of Asia. The establishment of the two colonies, Miletus and Megara in the area of Pontus, helps us to estimate when the myth of the Amazons and Heracles in Thermodon was created. It is noteworthy that neither Homer, not Hesiod knew anything about these struggles. Our knowledge about this subject enriches the depiction of the myth in art. The campaign of Theseus in Asia and the abduction of the Head of the Amazons resemble the story of Heracles adventures, but it is difficult to decide which type of the two heroes is the original. Were the Dorians who took the legend from the Ionians and adjusted it to Heracles or vice versa?⁶¹ Nevertheless, the myth of the Amazons during the classical period has many sociopolitical characteristics. In his ninth labor Heracles, who is ordered by Eurystheus to bring the belt of Hippolyte, represents a hero that lives in a male dominated society and takes, by force, the authority and all the symbols of the matriarch society. He also represents the

⁵⁹ Tyrrell W. B., 1984.

⁶⁰ Euripides Heracles, 408, Apollodorus, 2, 5, 3.

⁶¹ Pausanias 12,1, Philochorus, 49, Plutarch Theseus. 26.

model of the masculine male who thanks to his supernatural power can impose on the Amazons who are an example of wild femininity. Without any reasoning, he establishes his will, which determines the rights of men over women. Hippolyte is obliged to give him the belt, which symbolizes the power in general, the power that stems from the use of this belt and the power of the strongest. However, the ancient Greek word that is used for the word belt is 'ζωστήρα', which is a man's belt⁶². We can distinguish two aspects here: This choice of word involves two opinions. On the one hand, Mars gave this belt to a woman and probably this gesture includes a symbolism of masculinity and equality. It is not a coincidence that the Amazons were considered to be daughters of Mars⁶³, so the belt cannot be a female ornament, but a male item that Amazons can wear, since they are counted as men. In the same way, we can explain the story of Theseus. The epic poets of 6th century BC tried hard in order to create an equally important hero in the conscience of the world. The myth of the rape of the Amazon by Theseus and her abduction to Greece is the necessary trigger for the expedition of the Amazons to Athens and for the subsequent siege. We can thus have the opportunity to explain the etymology of many place names. The siege of Athens and the strong defense of Theseus reflects the climate that had been developing shortly after the suppression of the revolt of the Ionian cities in Asia Minor against the Persians. There is an effort to awake the patriotic feelings of the Athenians and to mobilize them against the oncoming threat. The victory of the Athenians and Theseus works as a shining beacon of courage, bravery and patience. All the representations of the Amazons in Parthenon or in Theseion or in Stoa Poikile or elsewhere show that the Athenians considered the Amazons first as enemies and then as women. The myth of the Amazons is the status quo in three different social areas of Athens during the classical period⁶⁴. First of all at the military level, the successful defense and the victory over the Amazons is a shining example of the previous generations that modern Athenians followed successfully, as they had already defeated the Persian threat in the past and not only

⁶² Boardman J., 1980, 181-2.

⁶³ Stephanus, *Grammatica Ethnica* (epitome), 92,19, *ἔστι καὶ [ἄλλο] Ἀκμόνιον ἄλσος περὶ Θερμώδοντα, ὡς Φερεκύδης, ἐφ' οὗ μιν γαίης Ἄρης τῇ Ἀρμονίᾳ τὰς Ἀμαζόνας ἔσχεν, ὡς Ἀπολλώνιος ἐν δευτέρῳ.*

⁶⁴ Tyrrell W. B., 1984, 125, Tyrrell W. B., 1980, 1.

that. The city of Athens became hegemonic among many others and remained the head city of Greece, since it was the city with the strongest military, political and economic power. So the Amazonomachy was the necessary figment of classical Athens in order to detect the causes for the current bliss. A second area that should be examined is the connection of the myth with the religious worship of the goddess Athena during the time of Pericles. On the huge temple of Athena, which was located in the temple of Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis, there were many amazing and vivid representations of the Amazons⁶⁵, which apart from the symbolic value, also have a symbolic significance. The old myth of the predominance of goddess Athena instead of Poseidon⁶⁶ is balanced by the victory of the Athenians against the Amazons. On the shield of Athena, we can see various representations, where glorious kings like Theseus, Cecrops, Erechtheus and Pandion defend their own city⁶⁷. The goddess Athena symbolizes the city of Athens and the representations on her statue symbolize the unstoppable dedication, the consistency and the fight for the preservation of all the sacred and holy values that she represents. The Athenians were indigenous and nobody was able to conquer them, even the tribe of the virgin woman, who resembled the nature of their goddess. The subordination of the Amazons, who were the idol of the goddess, symbolizes the need to remain the goddess in the territory of Athens and to appease all those characteristics that are against the social values of the era.

On a third level, the defeat of the Amazons symbolizes the subjection of the female sex, of the unbridled sexuality and the deviant and delinquent behavior. In a patriarchal model of social life, where the role of the woman is predetermined and limited, it is necessary to stamp on any kind of deviation. The aim of the girls in the city of Athens was to leave their house only in order to get married and have children. The

⁶⁵ Harrison E. B., 1966, 107.

⁶⁶ Athena and Poseidon claimed the same city. Then they climbed the Acropolis and decided that whoever offered the residents the most beautiful gift, would acquire Athens. Poseidon struck his trident on one side of the hill and immediately a spring of water gushed out. The people admired, but the water was salty as seawater, which was the kingdom of Poseidon. Athena's gift was an olive tree, which was better, since it provided the city food, oil and timber. So Athena won the duel and gave Athens the name of the goddess.

⁶⁷ Harrison E. B., 1966, 113.

Amazons represent the exact opposite and they are an example that should be avoided by Athenian women because their exaggerations and their excesses can only lead to disaster. The marriage and the household are a woman's destination and consequently the only way to be accepted into society. The Amazon symbolizes the unnatural reversal of the social roles by setting a matriarchal model of life. So in the labor of Heracles the prevalence refers to the victory over the male side of the Amazon but in the case of Theseus the rape, the betrayal of Antiope/Hippolyta for the sake of love, the escape, the defeat, the final punishment and death indicate the prevalence and the domination of men over a hybrid-type of woman.

In the various versions of the romantic story of Alexander and Thalistris⁶⁸, the same pattern is repeated, in a different time frame of course, where myth and history coexist. The exciting story of Thalistris, in the way in which it is presented to us, seems to be clear, smooth and plain. There is a sequence of events, whose historical authenticity is generally accepted both by ancient and modern scholars, however the truth was always difficult to be proved or refuted. What matters the most is not the romantic or the scandalous part of the story. More important is to make an effort to explain why this story was recorded. According to E.Baynham⁶⁹, the story is not xenophobic and it does not give Macedonians a warning that their morals are in danger. As she states, the story of Thalistris and Alexander visualizes and makes more graphic the need to promote the relations between the Greeks and the foreigners, in an effort that Alexander had started in order to stir up mixed marriages. The friendly attitude of the conqueror towards the conquered takes shape in this story. Alexander agreed to have a child with the Amazon. This child would be his successor and would come from the best genes. Besides, according to E.Baynham⁷⁰, if there was an aim for Alexander to be represented as a successor of the Greek culture against the Amazons, the story should be accompanied by the triumphant victory of the commander over the barbarian Amazons. As she also states, the myth has a soothing and conciliatory influence over the Greeks and the conquered people· that means that the policy and the power of Alexander has humanitarian nature and works against xenophobia.

⁶⁸ Baynham E., 2001, 115.

⁶⁹ Baynham E., 2001, 126.

⁷⁰ Baynham E., 2001, 123.

On the other hand, there is a contrasting view, which says that this story was made with the intention of protecting the Greeks from the oriental dangers⁷¹. It is certainly not easy to dismiss at first glance the one or the other opinion. First of all the episode itself raises problems of authenticity. The different opinions were expected since we are talking about a sexual intercourse between two special personalities: a hero that later was worshipped as a god and a woman that was recognized as the “queen of Amazons”. Plutarch repeats a well-known funny dialogue, which concerned two veterans of Alexander’s campaigns. Only some extracts of the original dialogue, which belong to Onesicritus, are preserved and contain much valuable information, although the specific writer’s descriptions were always characterized by exaggeration. In the work of Plutarch, when Onesicritus gave Lysimachus information about the queen of the Amazons, he smiled and asked: “Where was I then?”⁷²

Even if questions about the existence of Thaliastria and the authenticity of the episode arise, we can detect many elements that show the diversity of the conquered nationalities, their habits, the need for respect for their individuality and finally the qualitative difference or superiority of Macedonians over the easterners. First of all, we must take into consideration that we are much time after the Persian wars and especially after Alexander has conquered the territories near the Indus River. The Persian state belongs to the past, and now, in a world that is experiencing tremendous social and cultural changes (Hellenistic times), the reader stops being a member of the city state and becomes a world citizen. The Amazons were mythical people of the East and their characteristics and habits were completely foreign and different from the known Greek. The fact that a woman warrior decides her fate, comes alone to find a husband and have sexual intercourse, is in complete contrast to the Greek ethics. This information of course is indicative of a general view on the barbarians’ ethics, who were characterized by lax ethics and uncontrolled sexuality. So Thaliastria and her followers were a degenerate group that were in consistent pursuit of debauchery. It is also mentioned that Thaliastria spent many days and nights with Alexander and promised him that if their child was a girl she would raise it by herself. If it was a boy, she would give

⁷¹ Daumas M., 1992, 348.

⁷² Baynham E., 2001, 118.

it to him. According to several testimonies of historians of antiquity, her offer reflects the traditional child-rearing practices which women and men of barbarian, nomadic tribes followed. The boys were given back to the tribes of their fathers, who adopted them as legal heirs. Such arrangements, according to which boys and sometimes girls grew up under the protection of related groups or tribes, were common and widespread among the people of Caucasus and other tribes of Eurasia as a method of forming an alliance.

The majority of scholars support the idea that the story of Thaliastria could be a simple effort of creation of a legend. In this case, Alexander had an obligation to meet the Amazons like his mythical ancestors Heracles and Achilles did. The fact is that although both heroes and also Achilles and Bellerophon had already confronted the Amazons, overwhelmed them and put their queen to death, there is no similar reference in the story of Thaliastria. On the contrary, the queen returned to her homeland with her company. Baynham says the sexual intercourse was part of Alexander's policy who tried to bridge the gap between the conquered and the conquerors. But the historical background and the descriptions of Curtius does not support this view. According to Daumas, after beating the queen of the Amazons, Alexander completed a glorious action equivalent to the conquest of Asia. However the conqueror seems to lose, since Alexander is affected by Thaliastria (symbol of barbarism), so his behavior is transformed into barbaric and oriental. The reference to the relationship between the King and the Amazons is also justified by another charming, pleasant but dangerous aspect of the female warriors. It could be a reproduction of the standards that were set by the description of the love of Achilles for the dead Penthesilia or by the marriage of Theseus with Antiope-Hippolyte-Melanippi and the love for their son Hippolytus. The appearance of the Amazons could be literary essential for the simulation of Alexander with his mythical ancestors or for the identification of the woman warriors with the Persians or for the connection of the historical events with the traditional areas of the Amazons. Many scholars have identified deviations between the sources that have survived and the emergence of the Amazons' myth in the Alexandrian historical works and thus tried to answer why an episode of mythology was included in Alexander's saga. Some believe that it is possible to be detected in real historical facts or events. Perhaps in this case the story of the Amazons was inspired by the story of Atropates or

Farasmani, by the Scythian wedding stockpile and by the visit of the indigenous princess with her female warriors. It is also understood that the incident could be a figment of imagination, where Alexander imitated some mythical ancestors like Heracles and Achilles. The episode may actually be, in part, a romantic expression of reconciliation between conquerors and barbarians with quite sensational and spicy elements⁷³. However, it cannot be supported that the fear for the unknown was constant and although the historical information advocate the widespread opinion that Macedonians were suspicious about Alexander's novelties, this episode may symbolize the voluntary subjugation of the foreign, exotic factor to the occupier.

THE AMAZONS AS FOREIGNERS IN THE GREEK SOCIETY

As it was mentioned before, the myth of the Amazons has its origins in a socio-cultural environment, which chronologically belongs to the period that is conventionally called prehistory. However, the myth was used by historians in the form of historical events⁷⁴. Thus, the fiction was enriched, the myth was used in real life and was influenced by the social affairs. It is no coincidence that like all the other myths, the Amazons were popular to the masses and the relationship between them was interactive. But how and why was the Amazon considered as a foreign, hostile and unwanted figure in literature? How is the woman – Amazon related to the ancient Greek perception of the female sex? And how a mythological figure is being utilized in the rest literary production?

In Homer, we do not find any ethnocentric or derogatory descriptions of foreigners⁷⁵. He only uses once the word “βαρβαρόφρωνος” in a purely descriptive sense. Regarding the Amazons, he does not make any pejorative reference and the adjective that he always uses to characterize them is “αντιάνηπαι”⁷⁶, which is of particular importance and value. Besides, anyone that is able to demonstrate his bravery and his

⁷³ Baynham E., 2001, 123.

⁷⁴ Cartledge P., 2002, 42.

⁷⁵ Νάσσης αὖ Καρῶν ἡγήσατο βαρβαρόφρωνων, *Iliad* II 867.

⁷⁶ (...ἤματι τῷ ὅτε τ' ἦλθον Ἀμαζόνες ἀντιάνειραι.), Z 186 (...τὸ τρίτον αὖ κατέπεφεν Ἀμαζόνας ἀντιανείρας...), *Iliad* Γ 189.

military skills is welcome to the epic environment. But since the mid – 6th century and especially since the beginning of the 5th century, we can observe in pottery and later or simultaneously in literature the manufacturing process of the “other”, the “stranger”, which is an early version of what is known today as “orientalism”⁷⁷. Catalytic was the failed revolution of the Ionian cities (500/499 - 494 BC) and the subsequent Persian invasion, that was the reason for the creation of the Athenian xenophobic hegemony.

This issue began much earlier with the description of the Greek historiographers who gave information about the aberrant lifestyle and habits of the Amazons. Ferekides and Hellanicus⁷⁸ only gave some references to their origins and to the fact that they had wildlife, they had their right breast cut and they killed their male children. This information was in accordance with the oral tradition of their time. These early remarks were of great importance. The Amazons were not subordinated to men but they used to kill them. This was an insult to the morals of the time because it represented, in the worst way, the matriarchal model of life. On the other hand, the severance of the right breast refers to the refusal of the mother’s role to nurse their children. The Hippocratic reference to the Amazons⁷⁹ also involves the description of their paradoxical habits and the cutting of their right breast. The aversion, to the male gender, was one of the basic components of the myth that was also used by later generations. Euripides examines the problems and the difficulties of the institution of marriage through the son of an Amazon, Hippolytus, who is confronted with the forbidden love of his stepmother. Herodotus mentions the mixing of the Sauromatae with the Amazons and follows the same perspective, which is based on the element of gynaeocracy and their refusal to accept the male domination. Apart from that, another aspect of the unorthodox social behavior of the Amazons could be emphasized. Herodotus⁸⁰ compares the mixing of the southern Nasamonians with the northern mas-

⁷⁷ Georges P., 1994, 35, Hall E., 1989, 60, Fondation Hardt, *Greco et Barbares*, 1964, 13.

⁷⁸ Jacoby H., 1940, Fr.15.1,64, F.3b, 323a, F.17c, 3.

⁷⁹ Littre E., 1961-3.

⁸⁰ Herodotus History, 4,172.2/1.216.1.

sagetones⁸¹. The Athenian law, according to which the murder of an adulterer who was arrested during the act was legal, did not apply to them. Although the custom of the legal marriage existed, they did not recognize the exclusive monogamy and the subsequent adultery. What the Amazons wanted from the Sauromatians was only to have sex with them. This behavior seemed extremely daunting to the Greeks of the classical period and of classical Athens that accepted another strict status of the female behavior. On the mythical level, the Amazons functioned as the perfect non-Greek model, maybe because they rejected the Greek institution of marriage. According to Vidal-Naquet⁸², the fantastic state of the Amazons is the opposite of the Greek city located in a specific region. The confrontation with the barbaric, savage and almost unreal Scythians not only places the Amazons to contrast with the Greeks, but also complicates the dispute when they say to Scythians: “we could not live with women of your region since our customs do not match with yours. We are able to use arrows and ride, unlike your women’s occupations that are unknown to us⁸³. So the «γυναικῆια ἔργα» are beyond the reality of the Amazon’s life, which is identified by the adjective «νόμια». In other words the comparative confrontation with the Scythians, who transformed into Greeks, highlights the barbaric nature of the Amazons. The refusal of the latter to become legal wives of the wild and warlike people of the Scythians support the idea that the Amazons were more deviant from the social norm that was acceptable. The proposal of the women warriors to live with the Scythians but only on their own conditions resembles the way that the Persian invaders demanded land and water from the Greeks. The direct consequence of the way that Herodotus describes the above incident, lead as to the assimilation of Greek women with those of Scythia. The semi-wild Scythian women should tolerate the sexual intercourse of their men with the Amazons, who had no respect for the moral principles and would modify their men in order to impose on them another more brutal and uncompromising way

⁸¹ Pembroke S., 1967, 5.

⁸² Vidal-Naquet P., 1986, 208.

⁸³ Herodotus History, 4.114, *Ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἂν δυναίμεθα οἰκέειν μετὰ τῶν ὑμετέρων γυναικῶν· οὐ γὰρ τὰ αὐτὰ νόμια ἡμῖν τε κάκεινσιν ἔστι. ἡμεῖς μὲν τοξεύομεν τε καὶ ἀκοντίζομεν καὶ ἵππαζόμεθα, ἔργα δὲ γυναικῆια οὐκ ἐμάθομεν· αἱ δὲ ὑμέτεραι γυναῖκες τούτων μὲν οὐδὲν τῶν ἡμεῖς κατελέξαμεν ποιεῦσι, ἔργα δὲ γυναικῆια ἐργάζονται μένουσαι ἐν τῇσι ἀμάξεσιν, οὐτ’ ἐπὶ θήρην ἰοῦσαι οὔτε ἄλλη οὐδαμῇ.*

of life. Herodotus used the “barbarian woman” in order to create a limited in space and time anti-Greek, fantastic world that would be the opposite pole of the Greek society⁸⁴.

This information and the individual versions of them, reinforce the belief that the influences that shaped the myth of the Amazons are strongly characterized by a matriarchal background, like the one that gave birth and formed the great and powerful goddess, the Earth⁸⁵ who was characterized as the big Mother. The society of the Amazons is called «ἔθνος γυναικοκρατούμενον», which means a society in which women have the power by applying the so-called matriarchal model. This perception started with the work of J.J. Bachofen who systematically dealt with the myth and tried to explain it as matriarchal⁸⁶. They live and survive alone, they do not need the male sex and the male protection and they enjoy their independence. The preservation of their virginity and the chastity of their body identifies them to some extent with the goddess of hunting Artemis and underlies the relationship with the chthonic deities and especially with Mother Earth⁸⁷. What characterizes the Amazons is the attractive and riveting combination of wild and unpretentious beauty with the simple lifestyle and the exotic femininity due to the pious observance of their virginity.

This is the form of the Amazon that became part of the fiction until the time of Homer. As we have seen, since the classical period⁸⁸, the myth of the Amazons refers to the ninth labor of Heracles and the kidnapping-rape of Antiope by Theseus and the subsequent siege of Athens. It is no coincidence, that there are references to the Athenian conception and development of the myth, or rather to a serious version of the myth. Since the Great Dionysia of 472 BC and the presentation of the “Persians” of

⁸⁴ Loman P., 2004, 36.

⁸⁵ For the people of that ancient era, the birth of a human, an animal, a plant was something mysterious and in order to explain this, they imagined the earth as the Mother of all creatures and base of the world, named her “Great Mother” and worshiped her as a goddess. Neumann E., 1963, 18-24, Bennett F. M., 1967, 17.

⁸⁶ Bachofen J.J., 1861.

⁸⁷ Neumann E., 1963, 267.

⁸⁸ Besides the several fragments, we do not have many fragments in order to detect how the writers handled the myth between the 7th and the 6th century BC.

Aeschylus becomes clear the social trend of the enemy to degrade any alien element. The historical data, encounter the fiction, and the “management” of the material by each creator – mainly in literature and less in art – is influenced by the political and social sense. So after a while, the Amazons lost their glamour as lofty and exotic warriors and became a challenge for the greatest Greek heroes, who fought against them as equal to equal, like in the case of Priam, Bellerophon and Achilles. For propagandistic reasons the hero of Attica, Theseus, usurped some of the labors of Heracles and one of them was the abduction of Antiope that led, as it is known, to the campaign of the Amazons against the Athenians and to their final defeat. The Amazons of the Homeric folklore are not the same with those of the Athenian version. In order somebody to understand and evaluate more easily the importance of the myth of the Amazons in comparison to the ideology of the Archaic and Classical Athens, two things must be taken into consideration: first of all the social stereotypes and social types of the era and secondly the way that sex was exploited as a criterion for understanding the various problems and issues of the classical period.

The ethics and the lifestyle of the Amazons were in complete contrast to the patriarchal structure of the Athenian society. These women warriors were a human being that from an anthropological point of view was something between a man and a monster with supernatural powers. Of course, as it was mentioned before, the figure of the Athenian hero Theseus is able to bring back the “normality” through violence and sexual intercourse with the virgin Amazon. At this point, it should be noted that according to the Athenian patriarchal model of social practice, the woman was confined to the interior of the house unlike men who worked outdoors⁸⁹. The man determined everything about marriage and sexual intercourse while he was responsible to teach young boys the customs and the principles of the paternal home. The Amazons on the other hand were the personification of an open and naturalistic life. Their nomadic way of life is very well known and despite the fact that there are references to Themiscyra, their geographically indeterminate capital, there is no certainty of an organized urban community. Everything, concerning their life expresses movement and change (hunting, war, and physical exercise). The severed breast demonstrates disre-

⁸⁹ Tyrell W. B., 1980, 45.

gard for breast feeding and raising of children and shows clearly the commitment to martial and hunting activities. Of course, it is not known exactly how they were fed and how they handled all the demanding tasks that were considered as masculine jobs.⁹⁰ Diodorus says that the Amazons were not involved in agriculture, but the neighboring people supplied them generously, with products. Strabo on the other hand supports the idea that the Amazons knew many things about crops and agriculture⁹¹. It is likely that the neighbors had a relationship of fear and necessity with the Amazons, so they were forced to offer them livestock or agricultural products. The lack of resources and the lack of references, indicate that the interest is not focused on this field since we talk about a fictional product that raises the interest only through things that are considered as important, like their military nature. Once again, the Amazons appear as massive warriors, that thanks to their power of enforcement that derives from their unnatural martial skills, they enjoy their lifestyle without being deprived of food, although they do not like to cultivate produce.

Regarding marriage, we can safely say that they avoided it because they considered it as slavery, and only when they determined to marry, they sought for their erotic partner only for reproduction. Strabo⁹² mentions that they had sexual intercourse with Gargarius every year for two months, secretly and only during the night because something like that was inappropriate for the Athenians, who believed that all the matters of a couple should be protected by the security that offered them the privacy of their house. And the most important thing was that in Athens of classical period, all women were considered respectable only when they got married, if it was possible. According to Medea of Euripides, not getting married was not an alternative⁹³. Although Medea had Phrygian origin, she retained the modesty that a typical Athenian wife ought to have during her life. One could say that Medea and the Amazon Antiopé/Hippolyta had common elements in the Athenian society of the 5th century. They were both foreign and they both betrayed their homeland for a man, whom they fol-

⁹⁰ Diodorus Siculus, 3.53, 4-5.

⁹¹ Strabo, 11.5,1.

⁹² Strabo, 11.5,1.

⁹³ Euripides Medea, 214-251.

lowed to his homeland. Of course the development was different but the outcome the same. Neither of them could survive in a hostile and suffocating society, and they both eventually lost their lives. These stories raise many questions about the life of women in classical Athens. How restricted was the life of a proper wife? Was she able to escape the confines of her family life and find support? To what degree could she expect help from her organized society in case of violence and abuse? In any case, it is obvious that it was extremely difficult for a foreign woman to survive in Athens of the Persian wars. If we take into consideration that a marriage was a source of social benefits, property and power for a man, we can understand why Jason rejected Medea and preferred the daughter of the king of Corinth. Indeed if we take into account the law of Pericles in 451-450 BC, according to which, the children of a non-Athenian woman did not acquire political rights, but also the fact that men in Athens were allowed to have a relationship with concubines, it is obvious how incompatible the presence of an Amazon in ancient Athens was.

In the myth of Amazons, children entirely belonged to their mother. Female infants were important and male were expelled or given to their father⁹⁴ or killed. The Amazons did not have a parental identity since they were raising future warriors. The identity of the father was degraded, so the precautionary measures that were imposed in Athenian society, through the institution of marriage did not exist in their lives. The inextricable religious and moral bond that was developed between the father and the son in the formal, traditional Greek family did not exist in the case of the Amazons. The family is the vital core of a patriarchal model that serves as a foundation for the society and the institutions of the state. Women want to be good and honorable women and mothers and men want to be good fathers, warriors and active citizens. The Amazons overturn this pattern and take the place of men by creating a new matriarchal model. The only conventional element that connects them with other women is the raising of the (female) children and the worship of gods. The Amazons worshipped the god Mars, who is said to be connected in origin with the goddess Diana, for whom they built a temple⁹⁵. The religion of the Amazons has many common elements with their identity

⁹⁴ Strabo, 11.5.1.

⁹⁵ Bennett F. M., 1967, 30-57.

and their lifestyle. They worship the god of war and the goddess of hunting, virginity and protection of wildlife. Their contacts with religion are without the mediation of men, thus violating the beliefs, the hierarchies and the practices of metropolitan Greece. Despite the fact that they worshipped the same gods, they were perceived as barbaric, because they were also different on this level. They worshipped the goddess Artemis because she was wild and masculine but they did not keep her virginity and they adopted some characteristics of Aphrodite like her eroticism and sexuality⁹⁶. Certainly, all their romances do not have happy endings and they never lead to marriage. Theseus seduced Antiope, took her to Athens but he did not marry her because she was killed. Achilles saw the beautiful Penthesilia and he thought that she would be the most suitable wife for him. Of course, this thought occurs after the Amazon's death. The pattern of the virtual, dead wife is something that is repeated constantly since it is convenient and allows the creation of a female myth, which is characterized by passion and love and indicates the moral superiority of the Greek hero.

The subjugation of the Amazon is a victory of a hero or demigod (Bellerophon, Achilles, Theseus, Heracles, Alexander) which indicates the superiority of the male sex and the patriarchal model. At a social level, we can see that there is a need to reverse the disorder that derives from the unconventional life of the Amazons and to confirm the male domination. In Athens of the 5th century BC, this need is obvious, since there is a war against any foreign element that invades the Athenian society (490-403 π.X). In the Athenian drama, we can see many references to sexist and racial standards with strong trends of misogyny⁹⁷, while the presence of the foreign remains stable (Andromache, Hippolytus, Medea, Hecuba). However, this trend does not limit poetry⁹⁸. It is not coincidence that writers like Lysias, Demosthenes⁹⁹ and Plato¹⁰⁰ mention the Amazons and their habits in order to praise. In any case, the only thing that can be said with certainty is that the myth of the Amazons remained alive and flexible during the classical centuries in order to serve the propagandistic needs and the socio-cultural

⁹⁶ Quintus of Smyrna, 1.661-1.661-74.

⁹⁷ Zeitlin F. I., 1978, 149.

⁹⁸ Lysias speeches, *Epitaph*, 2.4-6.

⁹⁹ Dorjahn A., 1955, 222-3.

¹⁰⁰ Humphreys S. C., 1983, 52.

goals of the Athenians, far away from the heroism and imagination of the prehistory. The recent research has made many efforts to justify the creation and the revival of the myth in the Athenian society¹⁰¹. The volume of literature and the size of the debate are such, that it is not possible to examine it in this dissertation. What should be said is that the myth of the Amazons is a complex myth of Greek mythology, with many parameters that are based on the history of legends, on fantasy, on tradition, on literature on poetry and especially on the social reality of the particular era. The psychoanalytic or Freudian interpretations that dictate a more modern vision of the myth, try to explain the issue of prevalence of both sexes,¹⁰² and are added to the various finds of the archaeological research that revealed evidence for the existence or not of the Amazons¹⁰³, proving that way, that the myth is alive and evolves until today.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF ART IN THE FORMATION OF THE MYTH

The ancient Greek mythology, as it is known is based on the various literary sources and generally on the written texts, where we can find with more precision or detail, information about the ancient myths. As in any science, mythology is a part of a broader field of antiquity and there are many other sciences that help us substantially clarify the reality. Pictures of ancient sculptures, crafted pottery, jewelry and all kinds of material that bear mythological depictions can contribute to the formation of one or another point of view on an issue, when written sources are inadequate or have not survived.

The ancient Greek art, as a whole is a rich source of knowledge and information about the various myths that can be isolated and studied independently as a separate discipline. The massive and diverse wealth of Greek mythology has the same fate with all written texts, which mean that it is delivered to us either incomplete or one-dimensional, since it is known that a mythical story is being changed in the course of time in content and form. Sometimes, a story is presented although we do not find any information in literary sources, some other times the depicted details of the story are

¹⁰¹ Patten A. E., 2013, 6-10.

¹⁰² Leonhard W., 1911, Slater Ph., 1968, 123.

¹⁰³ Guliaev I. V., 2003, 112 - 125.

very different from those that are found in the literary versions of the myth and some other times a story is known only in a later and shorter form. The images on the vessels are the richest source of ancient legends, due to the large number of vessels that have been found and to the large production of these items in their time, which proves the popularity of this or another story. Sculpture on the other hand is the best source of information about the myths, although it is not characterized by the richness and details, which are provided by pottery. The first narrative scenes appear in pottery in 750 BC and lavishly enhance the decoration of private places, while in the field of sculpture we have illustrations almost exclusively in public buildings (churches, treasures, "treasures"), which thanks to their greatness and their position (metopes, pediments etc) they were a landmark in the evolution and history of Greek art and myths.

Regarding the Amazons, the imagery of myth takes place simultaneously with the appearance of written sources and they are dated and identified in the 8th century BC and onwards. (750-400 BC). However as it has already been mentioned, the first literary references to this myth are found in Homer's Iliad, in a simple narrative incident and without providing any details. Nevertheless, it is certain that the myth already existed in oral tradition and seems to be almost complete in its essential characteristics and although they are not saved in written sources, some elements of the myth are found in art. And at this point, lays the largest variation of the myth between the texts and the visual representation. According to D.v.Bothmer¹⁰⁴, the first recognizable image of an Amazon was found on a votive terracotta shield of Argolic type, dated around the 8th and 7th c BC. (Picture 1) Although it is not accurate since the warrior has no special characteristics, it can be argued that this is the duel between Hercules and Hippolyte or between Achilles and Penthesilia¹⁰⁵ since the battle of the Amazons with Bellerophon is not depicted in Greek art¹⁰⁶. D.v.Bothmer mentions that this is the only depiction that includes architectural structure and the location of the battle must be Themiscyra. However, it is not always easy to recognize the individual cases,

¹⁰⁴ Bothmer D. v., 1957, 1.

¹⁰⁵ It should be noted that information about the Amazonomachy in the Trojan war are given by Quintus of Smyrna, however the first literary work connected with this mythical event probably belongs to Arktino of Miletus and chronologically is very close to Homer, 1877, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Probably the military excellence of Priam with the Amazons is a later addition.

since the Amazonomachies were so many in Greek mythology and therefore so popular in Greek art. Achilles and Penthesilea are depicted fighting in reliefs from the late 7th c until the end of the 6th c BC and the specific duel is the subject of many Attic black figure vases. The earliest vases are the best preserved, like the famous black figure amphora of Exekias (530 BC). (Picture 2) Usually, Achilles is depicted holding the spear and prepares to stab Penthesilea, who is usually depicted fallen or bowed. Of course, there are several variants and one of them depicts Achilles falling in love with the Amazon while he kills her. On Italian vases of the 4th c BC, the romantic element is indicated by the figure of Achilles carrying the body of Penthesilea, that writhes. (Picture 3) According to Pausanias¹⁰⁷, another similar scene was created by the famous painter Panainos on the gold and ivory statue of Zeus in Olympia. From the first half of the 6th c BC many red figure vases with the same subject have been found.

The earliest positive depiction of Heracles with the Amazon is found on a Corinthian shield of the end of the 7th c BC, where the hero, the two companions and the Amazons are named. (Picture 4) But the main Amazon is written as Andromeda, not Hippolyte and on later Attic vases is labeled as Andromache. On another laconic chalice, Heracles is presented chasing an Amazon. The depictions of the myth of Heracles in art appear nearly two centuries earlier before the earliest literary source and present different aspects of the myth. It should be noted that his labor with the Amazons, was more popular to the artists since the Amazons were found depicted in over four hundred vessels. Heracles is depicted battling with his club and his lion skin and the Amazons wear the typical costume of soldier. Since 575 BC, the Amazons were one of the most popular subjects of the Attic black figure technique. A black figure Attic hydria for example depicts Heracles and Telamon fighting the Amazons, who are dressed as soldiers, carrying heavy weapons and have white skin. (Picture 5) In general, there are not many differences in the way that Greek artists depicted them. They have Greek armor, they hold Greek weapons and they fight with movements and postures like men. Despite the fact that their femininity is not indicated, the artist seems to persist in the moment of their defeat, when they fall subservient to the ground with their

¹⁰⁷ Pausanias, Description of Greece, 5.11.6, «τελευταῖα δὲ ἐν τῇ γραφῇ Πενθεσίλειά τε ἀφιεῖσα τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἀνέχων ἐστὶν αὐτήν».

head slightly tilted. On the metopes of the Athenians at Delphi, the temple of Zeus at Olympia and the Temple of Hephaestus in Athens, Heracles is shown fighting with only one Amazon. Another variation of the legend is found on an Italian red-figure vase dated in the 4th century BC, which presents a peaceful meeting of the hero with the Amazons, when the head of the Amazons symbolically delivers him the belt. (Picture 6) This scene is not preserved in Attic art.

As it was mentioned above, the Athenians used the Amazons in order to preserve the Athenian myth of the city that could not be defeated and had the defensive superiority by highlighting the local hero Theseus. The Amazons gradually lost their reputation as brave warriors since until then they were an incentive for the great heroes that were part of the Athenian propaganda. So around 490 BC on the metopes at Delphi Theseus is depicted alone or with Heracles in a military conflict with the Amazons. Regarding the Attic pottery Theseus is presented with his friend Peirithoos and his charioteer Phorba kidnapping an Amazon with a trick. (Picture 7) The kidnapping of Antiope was part of the west pediment of the temple of Apollo at Eretria where he is shown taking her on his chariot in the middle of a battle while Athena is present. This depiction is not preserved complete. According to Pausanias,¹⁰⁸ wall paintings of the subject were found on Stoa Poikile and at the sanctuary of Theseus in Athens. The pediments at Delphi also depicted episodes of the battle, which was also the subject of the front part of the shield of Athena Parthenos (Picture 8) and of the throne of the statue of Zeus at Olympia. Theseus is depicted kidnapping Antiope on his chariot on many black and red figure pottery vases of the late 6th and early 5th century BC and the first appearance of the subject was found in the penultimate decade of the 6th c BC, on a red figure vase of the vase painter Oltos¹⁰⁹. (Picture 9)

During the 6th century BC, the Amazons are presented with a heavy armor of a soldier, a short tunic, greaves, helmet and short spear. Their white skin is also characteristic and distinctive of the female figures of the black figure vases. Despite the fact that the Amazons were treated as foreign and barbaric in the archaic and classical period, they fight in the same way and the same armor, although coming from foreign

¹⁰⁸ Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.15, 1.17, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Shapiro H. A, 1983, 106.

lands, almost exotic¹¹⁰. However, after the Persian wars, the Athenian art seems to find analogies between the Amazons coming from the East and the defeated Persians¹¹¹. The Amazons are presented wearing oriental dresses and using bows and arrows. A red figure amphora, for example depicts a Greek warrior between two Amazons who are dressed in Persian costumes. Their characteristics, for example hair and clothes, do not remind us female figures. In the Stoa Poikile, next to the siege of Athens by the Amazons, we can see the Greeks fighting the Persians at Marathon. A very common scene of the Athenian art, the Centauromachy (battle between Lapiths and Centaurs) is depicted on the pediments of Parthenon, next to the Amazons. This fact is not accidental and the symbolism is obvious because in Athens of the 5th century BC this was a quite popular mythical fact, comparable of that of the Amazons¹¹². Just as the Centaurs embody extreme manhood, violent, warlike and unrestrained, Amazons represent the female analogue that provoked culture. The Persians were presented as barbaric creatures characterized by male desire and promiscuity but at the same time as characters that deny all the traditional moral principles of classical Athens. The Amazons are part of this barbarian mentality because they violate the sacred and social conventions.

As regards the details, it would be interesting to see mismatches between the myth and the visualization. First of all, the constant presence of both breasts in artistic representation constitutes a contradiction to the myth. Perhaps this was happening because the artists wanted to indicate a more romantic and less repulsive side of the Amazons by following the same path for every female figure¹¹³. And perhaps the voluntary mastectomy was a literary convention. It is also interesting that the Amazons are not depicted naked, like all the female figures in art. But if we consider that men usually appear naked and the Amazons were considered as the alter ego of men, it is clear that apart from the war status they do not adopt any male form. Of course, in the course of time and the influence of the xenophobic factor, the depiction of the Ama-

¹¹⁰ Shapiro H. A., 1983, 106.

¹¹¹ According to J. Boardman, the parallelism of the Amazons with the Persians began after the rebellion in Ionia in the early 5th c BC, J.Boardman, 1982, 24.

¹¹² DuBois P., 1979, 43.

¹¹³ Stewart A., 1995, 597.

zons had oriental target. So they were presented with Scythian costume and armor¹¹⁴ having a bow, a quiver and an ax. They are dressed in an oriental costume, trousers, sleeves, sandals and a Greek helmet. The quiver replaces the spear of the earliest illustrations and seems to borrow elements from the Scythian archers. The figure of the body remains elegant due to the freshness of youthfulness and training.

Throughout this evolutionary process of the representation of the myth, the examination of the existing pottery findings plays a very important role¹¹⁵. The ancient myth of the Amazons has a special interaction with history and this procedure has many effects on its representation. Today, our knowledge about the myth would not be the same if it was not accompanied by some kind of art. A text can provide basic information on a mythological subject. However, when specific and detailed descriptions are missing, the visualization can contribute to more comprehensive and impartial conclusions. The myth of the Amazons, despite the fact that it is largely a product of imagination, can be based on the relations between the Greeks and the nomadic, Scythian tribes of the northern Black Sea. The archaeological evidence¹¹⁶ confirms that some aristocrats were buried with the decorative harness of their horses and their weapons, which proves that they fought and rode. It is difficult to accept the idea that the Amazons were not real women or were something in between¹¹⁷, and maybe we should really accept the fact that if they existed, they were rugged women who rushed to fight alongside their men.

CONCLUSIONS

The Amazons were a martial tribe, whose traces are lost in the past and are mixed with legend. Nobody can argue with safety that they were real people, just as they are described in various myths. Generally, tradition describes three variations of the myth. The first one talks about women who lived in the Valley of Thermodon River, in the area of the South Black sea. They were militarily organized and they worshipped

¹¹⁴ Shapiro H. A., 1983, 110.

¹¹⁵ Bothmer D. v., 1957, 1.

¹¹⁶ Guliaev V. I., 2003, 112.

¹¹⁷ Bisset K. A., 1971, 151.

the god Mars, who they thought was their parent, and goddess Artemis. They worked and behaved like men and they took up military posts and positions. They made wars and reached great achievements that were known even in the area of Greece. Later Heracles arrived in Themiscyra and after he defeated them, he limited their power. During the Trojan War, the Amazons and their queen Penthesilia distinguished themselves in the battle and they won the Greeks but their power was gradually minimized and finally disappeared.

According to the second variant, in the Libyan region lived different races of women. One of those was the Amazons, who stood out among the other nations, became a great military force and subjugated the neighboring enemies. Led by their queen Myrina, they did campaigns in various places (Africa, Mediterranean, Phrygia etc). They left their mark on the places they visited and they gave their names to several towns, shrines etc., but at the end they were defeated by Thracian and Scythian tribes, they dispersed and later they returned to their original birthplace.

Finally, there was the tradition that after their defeat by the Greeks, many of them were taken captive, but they managed to escape and reach the land of the Scythians in the Black Sea, near the Maeotis region. Apart from the initial clashes, they were able to live in harmony and at the end they became couples and they were organized in a society. In this place were born the Sauromatians, who believed in the equality between men and women.

According to all this information, it can be argued that the Amazons were nothing but an unnatural female presence in the war. Having a rich background of folklore and myths, ancient Greek literature and pottery followed mythology very closely and created a legend with fixed - to some extent - and timeless function. The presence of the Amazons in the myth is almost predestined and fixed. Each story is interspersed with exotic elements that irritate the soul of the listener. They are foreign, incompatible, lofty and beautiful but the most important: they live without men and fight them with the same courage. The mythical stories of the Amazons have a tiered development, which is not unrelated to the emotional world of the listeners. They were foreign warriors and the everlasting enemies that could damage the Greek heroes. They were the obstacles that should be overcome in order to dominate the "good person"

of each story. Even if it is Heracles or Bellerophon or Theseus the Amazons must die. There is no room for justice or feelings of sympathy towards them. The Amazons can be raped because they are incompatible. Since they do not live with the customary rules, they must be punished. They are considered as outsiders and therefore they must die. Even though women delight the imagination and the innermost sexual instincts of men, their way of life should be predestined. The initial threat can be transformed through rape or contempt into sensual pleasure and at the end comes the "clearance" which defines that women cannot escape their passions (weakness, propensity to sin, etc.) and their fate, which is in absolute compliance with the male-dominated society.

Moreover, the myth of the Amazons was used by historians and became part of the social and political life of the era. It is obvious that after the defeat of the Ionian cities and the Persian invasion, the Amazons obtained the profile of the barbarian and the "strange other" in literature and in art. Their way of life insulted the morality of the Greeks that accepted only the restricted position of women in the Athenian society, whose fate was only to get married and have children. And due to the huge fame that the myth achieved, it became a beloved subject of the artists, who created a large number of art treasures, which despite the fact that often do not provide us with the same information with literature, they are a valuable source for scholars, who until today are intrigued by these fascinating figures.

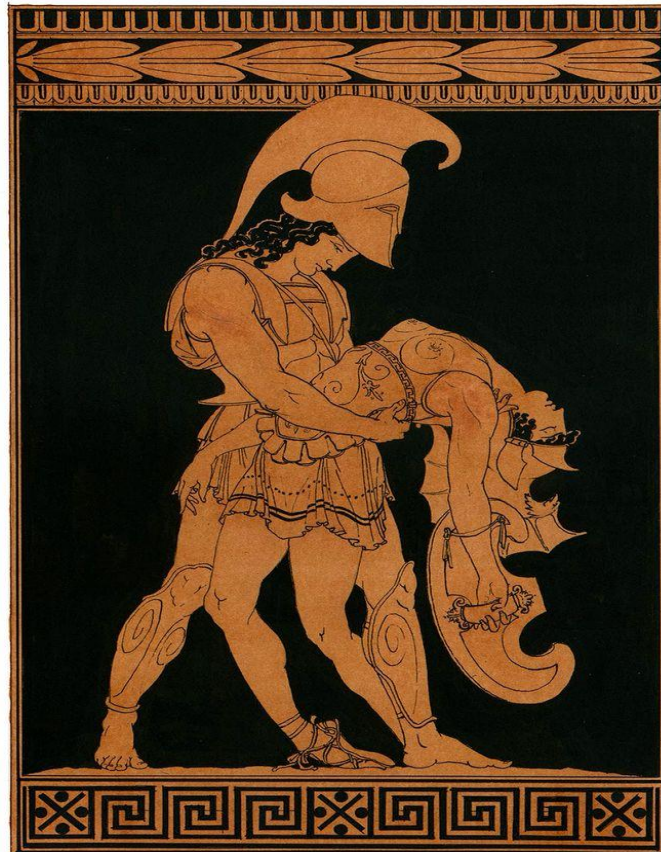
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Picture 1: Achilles and Penthesilea on a terracotta shield of Argolic shape found in Tyrins, Nafplion 7th c BC (Source: Von Bothmer D., *Amazons in Greek art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957, ch. I, no 1, p1.)



Picture 2: Attic black – figure amphora from Vulci, potter Exekias, around 530 BC
(Source: Von Bothmer D., *Amazons in Greek art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957, ch. IV, no 2, p70.)



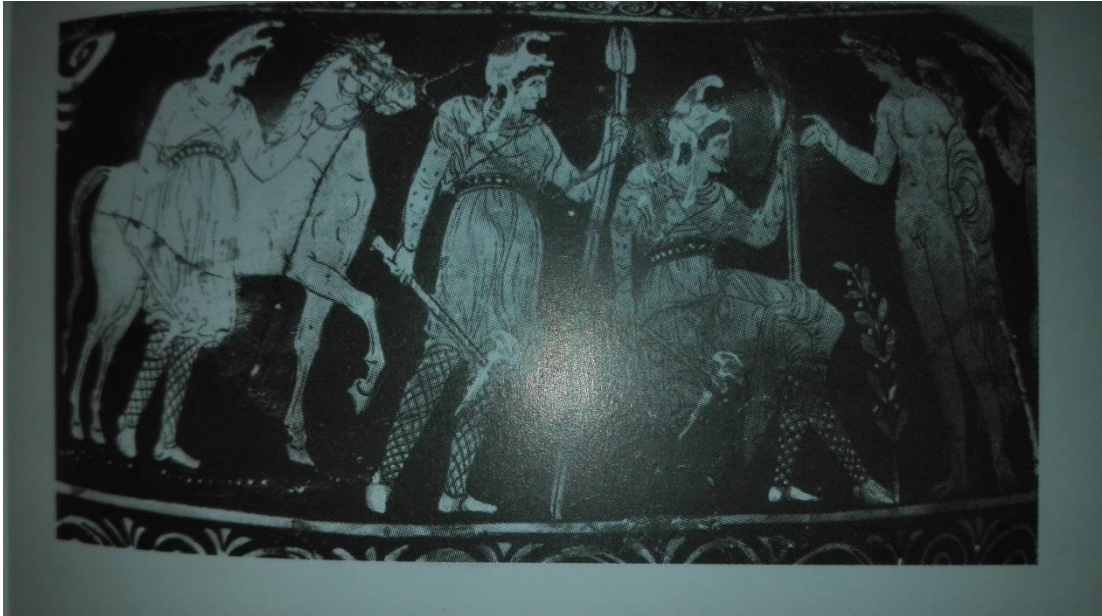
Picture 3: Achilles with the dead Penthesilea on a black - figure vase, made by an unknown potter around 4th c BC (Source: <http://www.ancientcivilizationslist.com/greek-civilization/famous-ancient-greek-vase-paintings/>)



Picture 4: Attic black – figure amphora from Vulci with Heracles and Andromache around 560 BC (Source: Von Bothmer D., *Amazons in Greek art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957, ch. II, no 8, p7.)



Picture 5: Attic black – figure hydria from Vulci with Heracles against the Amazons 530 BC (Source: Von Bothmer D., *Amazons in Greek art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957, ch. III, no 28, p36.)



Picture 6: Amphora from Puglia with Heracles and Amazons in a peaceful discussion, around 4th c BC (Source: <http://hel-las.blogspot.gr/2014/07/h.html>)



Picture 7: Theseus carrying Antiope with Peirithoos on a red figure vase around 490 BC (Source: Von Bothmer D., *Amazons in Greek art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957, ch. VIII, no 9, p 125.)



Picture 8: Roman copy of Athena's lost shield by Phidias (Source: <https://www.studyblue.com/notes/n/the-labors-of-herakles-17-38/deck/10366103>)



Picture 9: Attic red – figure cylix by Olto. Theseus abducts Antiope during the battle. Around 510 BC (Source: Von Bothmer D., *Amazons in Greek art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957, ch. VIII, no 8, p 124.)

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